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A Message to the Magians

Frank DeWitt Talmage

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A Message to the Magians

STUDIES UPON THE STORY OF THE NATIVITY

BY

FRANK DEWITT TALMAGE

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TO MY FRIEND

WILLIAM JACOB POPE

WHOSE NOBLE LIFE HAS

INSPIRED HOPE IN MANY TROUBLED HOMES

IS THIS CHRISTMAS MESSAGE

GRATEFULLY DEDICATED

1818

Preface

Many legends and superstitions cluster about the scenes of the nativity. Some of the modern Christmas customs may be traced back, not to Judean hills, but to the Saturnalian and Bacchanalian feasts of ancient Rome, or to the religious rites and customs of barbaric tribes. The ancient Britains believed the horses and cattle and sheep and goats, whether stabled or at large, in field and upon mountainside, knelt with their faces toward the manger when the angelic choir sang its first carol. The Yule Log, the Mistletoe, the "Lords of Misrule" find their origin in idolatrous worship. One writer declares that the modern custom of dressing the houses and the churches with evergreens and mistletoe probably dates back to the Druidical age, whose religious customs were in vogue long before history had any recorded pages.

Preface

As many superstitions cluster about the Christmas festival, the object of this booklet is to tell the simple Christmas story as found in the Bible, and to apply some of its beneficent teachings to the practicalities of everyday life. Christmas ought to be a holy day as well as a holiday. It ought to be a time when Love triumphs over Hate, and when Mercy and Forgiveness as twin sisters are enthroned queens in every home. It ought to be the time when big children, called men and women, and little children, called boys and girls, should learn how they can help the poor, the troubled, the ignorant and the helpless rather than how they can plan to get as many presents as possible for themselves from others. If this "Christmas Story" should inspire one man or woman or child to carry a message of the Christ-love to some broken heart, it will have accomplished at least a part of the mission for which it was created.

F. D. W. T.

September 1, 1902.

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A MESSAGE TO THE MAGIANS

I

Glad Tidings

Standing upon a Judean hill, the traveler can overlook the little village of Bethlehem. This is sacred ground. Here Boaz watched Ruth as she gleaned after the reapers. Here Samuel came to the house of Jesse to anoint David King of Israel. Here Jacob mourned and would not be comforted. Here Benjamin was born and Rachel died. On the night of the nativity, the Bethlehemites could have seen the lights of Jerusalem only six miles away, and heard the chanting in the temple, and the music and laughter in the palaces of Herod the Great, had it not been for the height of yonder mountain which obliterated the lights and stopped the echoing sounds. The cities and towns were crowded with men and

women. The fiat had gone forth that a census must be taken. Caesar wanted to know how many soldiers he could depend upon in the provinces, and how much taxes ought to be paid. Rome was then the mistress of the world. The Jewish census was to be taken by families. Joseph, the descendant of the great Psalmist David, directed his steps toward the little villages of Bethlehem, where once Israel's warrior-king, as a shepherd boy, tended his sheep and played upon his harp or flute, and practiced with his sling at a mark, until he could take that deadly aim which was to slay the mighty Philistine.

Joseph is now climbing the limestone rocks upon which is built the town of Bethlehem, foot-sore and weary and sad, his face drawn and anxious. He is hastening along, dragging by the bridle a beast of burden, which, with the characteristic stubbornness of its kind, is holding back merely because his owner jerks the head and wants to hurry along. The village is long and narrow. Most of the houses line the one principal street.

Groups of men stand idling upon the street corners, or gather in large numbers and with vehement gestures whisper curses among themselves against Herod, who was building a heathen temple in honor of the Roman emperor. The door of the inn or public-house is blocked with rustics who are trying to find lodgings. The owner of the hotel is insulting the people, because they will not stop interrogating him. It does not take a hotel clerk long to get ugly, if he has more customers than he has rooms.

Joseph stops and asks some of the bystanders where he can find lodgings. They shake their heads and shrug their shoulders. Some even ridicule him for asking such a question, when he can see for himself the crowds clamoring for quarters at the village hotel. Joseph turns and looks at the young girl who is seated upon the beast of burden which he is leading. She has a beautiful face, a sweet face, a loving face, a pure face. She is Mary the Virgin. Presently, some man, more sympathetic than the rest, seeing Joseph's troubles, points him to a

khan or public stable and says: "Perhaps you may find room there." Mary's strength has almost given out when they enter the low archway. Joseph tenderly lifts her down from the beast of burden. Some one kicks the oxen lying on the floor of the khan, to make them rise, because they are taking too much room. Even here space is at a premium. After the kind-hearted hostlers have thrown some straw into the stone crypt or manger, Mary is tenderly placed in this humble couch, amid the bleating of the sheep and the lowing of the cattle, and the neighing of the horses whinneying for their oats.

This is the most momentous of nights. It is inexpressibly solemn. All history will hereafter date from and toward the scene and the time: A. D. and B. C. Upon the Judean hillsides the affrighted sheep are running hither and thither, looking for their shepherds. Animals intuitively know when something supernatural is about to happen. The cattle can smell the blood long before they are driven into the slaughter-houses to be

killed. Hours before the North Carolina earthquake shook Charleston, a few years ago, the dogs crouched at their masters' feet and the birds hovered around, uttering shrill cries as though invoking human beings to protect them. The pictured horror of Dore's flood, where a lioness with her whelps trembles upon a rock by the side of a frightened woman who holds in her arms a babe, is not a zoological absurdity. Animals in times of danger naturally seek the protection of man.

There is a strange silence brooding over Bethlehem. The shepherds uneasily grip their staffs, and prepare for some impending event, which they feel sure is about to happen. Suddenly a star breaks from its fastenings and begins to descend through space. On and on it comes, like a meteor. With frightful velocity, it sweeps toward our planet, threatening to crash upon it as the human foot might crush an insect, or as the Campania might run down a fishing-smack, or a huge engine crash into a hand-car. The terror-stricken astrologers see it flying toward the earth. Suddenly it halts,

and seems to be watching something which is happening in the little village of Bethlehem. It may be the all-seeing eye of an Almighty God. The angel who once stood at the gates of Eden now unsheathes his sword and cuts the curtain of the night in twain. Waves of light rush down and push the darkness to the right and to the left. The great multitudes of angels begin to break forth in song. As the glory of God shines above the prostrate shepherds, there comes a voice, saying, "Fear not, for behold I bring you tidings of great joy." Dimmer and dimmer grows the light. Softer and softer echoes the music. The two worlds which were parted before unite now.

Glad tidings imply that something remarkable has happened. What was the chief cause of the celestial and terrestrial rejoicings? A Saviour was born. That is what the Bible distinctly states. "Fear not, for behold I bring you tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord." A Saviour was never more

needed than at the first Christmas, unless that Saviour is needed more by the world at the present time. The world did not then need a noted warrior. There had been many great military chieftains. Alexander the Great had lived and died. Rameses the Second had led his troops to their marvelous victories. Julius Caesar had been assassinated; not, however, before he had established a throne for a long line of kings. But the world, up to the time of the nativity, had had no Saviour. The Angel would never have announced to the shepherds: "Behold, I bring you tidings of great joy," if those glad tidings only referred to Christ's birth as the birth of a military despot. Then the angelic announcement would not have been glad tidings, because the life of every military leader who conquers by the sword alone means suffering and poverty and death and widowhood and orphanage and demolished homes to millions upon millions of down-trodden humanity.

Many wise men had existed before Christ was born. Some people are apt to

think the wise men lived only in the far east. 'Tis true, there were three wise men who came from the east to Jerusalem to worship at the manger. But there were many wise men of the west, as well as of the east. At the time of Christ's birth, nearly all the great Greeks who made the name of Athens famous had already completed their life's work. Homer had sung; Aristophanes joked; Phidias sculptured; Thucydides thought; Demosthenes thundered; Plato philosophized; Socrates preached; Herodotus written; and Solon expounded the law. The angelic messenger to the shepherds would not have announced the Nativity as glad tidings had Jesus been born simply as a wise man. Mere worldly intelligence does not make a man happy. At the height of Athenian, Ephesian, Egyptian and Babylonian culture, when art and military prowess flourished side by side, the sins, wassails and mental miseries of those nations were simply beyond description.

At the Nativity, the world did have need of a Saviour. It needed one who

was able to tell men and women how they could obtain pardon of their past sins and how they could live righteously in the future. It needed one who was able to tell the world that there was immortal life beyond the grave, and that death does not end all. It needed one to comfort the mother, who had lost her babe, with the thought that the child was living in a land where there is no more sin and sickness and suffering and parting and death. It needed one who could make every shower of tears glisten with rainbows, because God's smile is reflected through them. "A Saviour" is the word the Angel used when he announced to the shepherds the glad tidings. Not a tyrant, not a military chieftain; not an intellectual paragon; but a Saviour, a Redeemer, a Pardoner, and an Atoner for all sin.

"Saviour is a pathetic name," wrote Joseph Parker. "It is not an official title; it is not an image you can robe in scarlet and bow down before, on account of its majesty and haughtiness. 'Saviour' is an angel with tears in his eyes; with arms mighty as the lightnings of God, but a

heart all tenderness. 'Saviour' is a complex word. It has in it all human nature, all divine nature, all the past of history, all the possibility of prophecy, all the mystery of Apocalypse, a tenderness outvying the love of women, a majesty humbling the haughtiness of kings." Such was the Christmas birth of Christ.

Glad tidings imply that the good news is told with outward manifestations of joy. The messenger who comes to a foreign court to announce the death of his royal master, always travels dressed in the deepest black. But the messenger who starts forth to announce the marriage of a king, or the birth of a royal heir, goes robed in brightest colors, with a smile upon his lip and with light in his eyes. The messengers who announced the birth of the Saviour came as messengers of joy, not of sorrow; of hope, not of despair. It was a star of light that guided the three wise men to the manger, not a specter of doom. It was the glory of God that illumined the Judean hills on the night that Jesus was born; not the blackness of an eternal night. They were the voices of

the angels, singing a Christmas carol, that the shepherds heard; not the mournful ringing of a bell tolling the death-knell. They were the presents of gold and frankincense and myrrh, and the words "Fear not" that made the celestial happiness commingle with the terrestrial. It was glad tidings that the angel spoke to show his outward manifestation of joy.

Christmas Day should always be a happy day—the happiest of all the year. In olden times our ancestors used to make far greater preparations for Christmas than does the present generation. Upon the southern plantations, the young girls would elaborately decorate the homes with evergreens and with mistletoe, especially with the mistletoe. The young men would plant a big tree in the hallway and set it ablaze with candles. The slaves would go into the forest and hew down the tallest, toughest, widest forest monarch they could find. With great ceremony, the Yule Log would be dragged into the home and rolled into the old-fashioned fireplace, whose ample spaces were often larger than the hall-rooms of

the average boarding house. As long as a splinter of that wood remained, the festival and the merrymaking went on. In New England, there would be the sleigh-riding parties and the great family dinner, with grandfather at the head of the table and grandmother at the foot, and all the big and the little grandchildren lined up between. Then there would be the presents to be given to everyone; not as the mercenary modern custom sometimes dictates, but each one would give a little something as an expression of love. Then there would be the Christmas presents given to the poor families. "Merry Christmas!" would be shouted everywhere. Christmas in those olden times was as it ought to be to the present generation, a time when everyone should be happy by trying to make everyone else happy. If Christians truly believed that Jesus was born to liberate the world from sin, they could no more help singing during the Christmas holidays and trying to make others sing, than the angels could have kept from singing on the night Jesus was born.

"The world has grown old with its burden of care;
But at Christmas it always is young.
And the soul full of music breaks forth on the air
When the song of the angels is sung."

Glad tidings imply that many may be blessed by the good news, who have never yet heard the cause of all the glad tidings. The lexicographers' definition of "tidings" is, "the announcement of an event or occurrence not previously made known." The persons whose ears directly heard the chanting of the celestial choir, or whose eyes saw the new-born child on that first Christmas morn, were very few. Joseph the Carpenter saw Him. Mary the Virgin saw Him. The three wise men saw Him. A handful of shepherds who, in their excitement, had deserted their flocks, saw Him. Perhaps a few stable-men and a few kind-hearted women who came in to help Mary, may have seen Him. But Jesus was born for the Jew and the Gentile, the Greek, the Roman and the barbarian; the white and the black; the rich and the poor; the old and the young; the civilized and the heathen; for the absentees as well as for those who

were present. Christ was born "to all people." The sweeping effect of Christ's birth cannot be hemmed in by a social or national limitation. It is as wide as the two hemispheres, as far-reaching as the farthest distance to which the human race can travel. When the German paints the Nativity he often paints a German Christ, the Frenchman a French Christ, the Spaniard a Spanish Christ, the Russian a Russian Christ, the Englishman an English Christ, the Hollander a Dutch Christ, the Italian an Italian Christ, the American an American Christ. These artists may paint the Infant Jesus with the features of a child of their own nationality, and yet not violate the canons of sacred art. Such artists are right in part, and they are wrong in part. Jesus was not born a racial Redeemer, but a world's Saviour.

Some Universalists profess to believe that, as Jesus was born for all, therefore all the members of the human race shall ultimately be saved. Such a doctrine as that, is, of course, contrary to Scriptural evidence. Jesus was born to save all, if

all will believe in His divine birth and accept His divine teachings. If the sinner does not repent, as Christ bids him to repent, and believe as Jesus wants him to believe, the sinner is as much lost as if there had never been any Saviour. But for those who have never heard of Christ's name, for those who are trying to live as Christ would have them live by the dim light which is given them; for the heathen in the African jungle and the Esquimaux upon the Arctic iceberg, Christ's glad tidings certainly apply, as much as to those who have been born in Christian homes, who have grown up surrounded by Christian influences and who have every year gathered at family prayers to worship at the manger.

Glad tidings imply that the few who have heard the good news should tell the many who have not heard, so that all may be alike benefited. When the Declaration of Independence was about to be signed in old Independence Hall, Philadelphia, the couriers were waiting upon the edge of the city to carry the news to every part of the new nation. The signal

was to be given to these messengers by the ringing of the old Liberty Bell. The aged sexton stood in the belfry, his trembling hands upon the rope. When the last member had put his name to the immortal document, the grandson of the sexton ran up the rickety stairs crying, "Ring, grandfather, ring!" The old bell, worth to American sentiment more than its weight in gold, rang so loud that its bell heart broke. The couriers dug their spurs into the horses' flanks and rode from town to town, from village to village, from city to city, announcing the glad tidings of the birth of the nation. So the few men and women who had seen the first Christmas birth, and who had heard the angelic choruses, told the glad tidings everywhere. Bloody Herod alone was so troubled at the birth of the newborn king that the Hebrew ruler ordered his soldiers to slay every male child under a certain year of age, who was living in the land of Judea.

The civilized world has grown larger than it was on the first Christmas eve. The geographical map has undergone

many different changes. Great explorers have discovered new continents. The islands of the seas have been found to be inhabited. During the life of the ancient wise men and the shepherds, but few, comparatively few, of the human race knew of the existence of a Saviour, and even now, two-thirds of the inhabitants of the world have never heard of Christ's name. A large percentage of the remaining one-third are entirely indifferent to the teachings of Christ and the spread of the Gospel. Therefore to the Christian, Chrismas Day ought to be the most opportune of all days for proclaiming the Saviour's mission. Every home, every street corner, every family gathering should be the places where the deeper, fuller, holier purposes of Christ's life are to be explained by those who have felt the love and the tenderness and the mercy and the hope which have come to the believing hearts that have gathered about the manger.

This theory was once advanced by a noted teacher, to explain to the mystified mind why God let sin come into the

world. There were billions of planets, larger than our own; better upholstered with foliage; more softly carpeted with verdure; more brilliantly lighted by sun; with deeper seas, higher mountains, bluer skies and more fertile valleys. These billions of planets were inhabited by races similar to man; their atmospheres were filled with the songs of flying birds; their fields were the playgrounds for gamboling fawns; their rivers were full of fish. There every man and woman lived in a Garden of Eden, and the lion and the lamb slept side by side. There the harshest notes were the winds sighing among the tree branches. The darkest cloud was the morning cloud of spotless white. To show the inhabitants of those different planets what misery and woe were possible, if sin ever came into their midst, God selected the smallest, the poorest, the most insignificant of planets and said to Satan: "There, Demon, go and do your worst, that all my people and worlds may see the evil thou art capable of doing." No sooner did Satan leap upon this planet than the serpents began to wriggle and

hiss; the wild beasts to growl and slay; the insects to sting; disease and pestilence and hatred and vice to wrinkle and distort the face with jealousy and wrath. Then God repented of the evil that He allowed Satan to do, and He sent to earth, on the first Christmas morn, "His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

That part of the theory which described how sin came into the world, may be wrong, and in all probability is wrong. There can be no doubt, however, that the latter part of the theory is right, and entirely right. The Bible proves it. Christ's life taught it. That is the reason the angel came to announce on Christmas eve the Glad Tidings.

II

Family Reconciliations

The highest Christmas object should be to glorify God. But the Deity cannot be truly honored in heaven, unless on earth man tries to live in harmony with his fellow man. If loving God with all the heart and soul and mind and strength signifies that one must love his neighbor as himself, how much more should man love and deal gently with the neighbors who are nearest to him, his brothers and sisters, his wife and children and parents, his uncles and aunts and cousins, who are bound to him by consanguineous ties. But though God doth set the solitary in families, though the divine plan is for certain people to live closer to some than to others, though blood should be thicker than water, yet the strange fact remains that the grinning skeleton which rattles his bones and chatters his teeth every Christmas eve in almost every family closet, is the hideous skeleton of domestic strife.

This does not necessarily mean that the father and mother and little children liv-

ing within the four walls of a house are not peaceful and loving, or that most homes are unhappy; but it does mean that the family name, taken in its larger connections—in its dealings with the married children who have left their birthplace; in its dealings perhaps with the father or mother who have married the second time; in its dealings with the grown-up children, who have scattered after the old homestead was sold, when the aged parents were carried out to their last resting-place—is not always a harmonious name, a loving name; a name which asserts that each member of that family connection is ready to forgive injustices which have been done to him, as he is ready to be forgiven for the injustices he has done unto others. Are the different blood relatives individually willing to celebrate a truly sacred Christmas with "on earth peace, good will toward men," or are they trying to love God by despising and refusing to obey one of His most important divine commandments?

Family troubles are nearly always

caused by faults having been committed on both sides. The perfect judicial mind is the rarest of all minds. The brain which can calmly and deliberately weigh all sides of a question, and refuse to allow prejudice or desire to add one extra atom to either side of the scale, is the brain which ought to be sought after, and as much as possible developed by every living man, woman and child. The tendency of the human race is to study every question from a one-sided point of view. Most people try to study a cause with the intellect of an enthusiastic advocate, not of a wise judge. They study it that they may refute the arguments of an opponent, and they put their best facts forward to help their version of the case. While studying the wrongs which others have committed against them, they seem to ignore wrongs of which they themselves are not entirely guiltless. It is not now a question as to who has committed the greater wrong, but whether both parties are not in some degree, however small, to blame.

Almost all difficulties found to exist

between parents and children can be traced to two different causes instead of one. The father may have been a high-strung, nervous, quick-tempered, overworked and overwrought, impetuous man. The son may have inherited the same fiery disposition. It is a scientific fact that opposites conjoin, not similarities. The positive and the negative poles work together in harmony, not the electric wires carrying the same current. The reason the mother is able to live happily with the husband is because her nature is entirely different from his. The father and the son were continually irritating each other. One night there was a domestic explosion. The father ordered the son from the house. The boy never came back. He went to another city. He plunged into a life of dissipation. Were there not faults, grievous faults, on both sides? The daughter may have grown up the pride of the parental heart. She was the father's and the mother's idol. They sent her to school and gave her every educational advantage that money could give. She formed an affec-

tion for a young man which was not looked upon favorably by the parents. They did everything in their power to prevent the marriage. After the young girl left home, she felt that her husband and children were not wanted back in the place where the wife and mother was born, therefore she does not visit where they cannot go. The parents, in an unguarded moment, may have said that all their children wanted of them was their money. The daughter is poor but very proud. At times she has not had food enough even for her babies. Are there not faults on both sides?

Study the dissensions which often have separated brothers and sisters. When the old homestead was sold, the children scattered. Some are well married financially. Some have had their business misfortunes. The poor are apt to complain against the rich. The more affluent relatives may feel that the poorer ones do not properly appreciate what has been done for them. The poorer relatives may be over-sensitive on account of their poverty. The loving fellowships which

once existed between the different families are strained. Cousins may become jealous of cousins, and brothers and sisters take up the quarrels of their children. Faults are invariably to be found on both sides.

The great bar to all family reconciliations is the family separations. After brothers and sisters and parents and children are hurt by the flagrant wrongs of certain relatives, they rarely if ever come together to make mutual confessions of their faults, and thereby to have the dear old relationships restored. As the Satanic flames of hate blaze and leap and crackle and spurt and dance and glow most fiendishly when they devour the fuels of a splintered cradle, the dissatisfied relatives, year by year, become further and further estranged. The Bible clearly tells everyone who is a contending party in a family strife, what he or she should do. A man has no right to try and pull the mote out of his brother's eye, unless he has first cut out the beam which is in his own eye. Christmas is the time of family reunions. All the members of a family torn by in-

ternal strife are in some sense to blame. Every man, woman and child should first go to the party against whom they feel bitter, and explain away, or try to make reparation for their own faults. Then, as one party tries to live the Christian teachings of "on earth peace, good will toward men," the other party who is angered will try to do the same. Nearly all family differences by this means could be buried in a grave so deep that it would be as impossible to resurrect them, as it was for Bloody Herod's soldiers to find and to slay the Infant Christ.

It is easy for one member of a family to misjudge the motives and the position of another. People in one sphere of life can rarely appreciate the difficulties and trials and worries and disappointments and heartaches which are continually nagging and sapping the lives of people in other spheres of life. The mercantile world has but little sympathy for the nervous exhaustions of a professional career; the man with business cares for the anxieties of women; the capitalist for the troubles of the laborer; the employee

for the problems that confront the employer. Brothers in one sphere of life are continually finding fault with brothers in other spheres of life, and sisters with sisters, merely because they cannot fully appreciate the fact that they are each having an individual struggle for existence.

Then there is the matter of financial expense. A brother living in the country hears that his city brother has a yearly income of $5,000. He wants to borrow some money from his city relative to help stock the farm. The city brother writes back that he cannot afford to lend any money. The country brother is outraged that a man receiving an annual income of $5,000 should not be ready to lend him a paltry few hundred dollars. But the city brother, who receives an annual income of $5,000, may be having just as hard a time financially as the country brother, who rarely sees a dollar, the goods he buys from the country store being taken in exchange for the produce which he carries there in his farm wagon. The city brother may be a doctor, and for pro-

fessional reasons may be compelled to hire a house and office in a fine neighborhood. He has to keep a horse and carriage to make his calls. He must dress well or his patients would soon leave him. And when the year rolls round, the city brother, with $5,000 per year, may have just as hard work to make ends meet as his country brother. When the bills are all paid up, they may both come out even. Both may literally have nothing. The city brother may be a member of a business firm. Every cent he can make over his minimum of expenses he has to put back into the business, or his rivals will steal away his trade. There is such a condition as being business poor as well as land poor.

Some sister may say: "My brother never answers my letters now, as he used to do. He never shows me those little courtesies of love. And when I wrote the last time in a complaining mood, he sent me back a very sharp reply." Perhaps the reason the brother does not answer his sister's letters as he used to do is because he is a clergyman, a lawyer or

a newspaper man. Day after day, he sits and writes and writes and writes. The pen is always in his hand, until the very sight of paper and ink has for him a repulsion. How does the sister know what was the mental and physical condition of the brother when he wrote the sharp letter? From overwork, he may have been on the verge of nervous prostration, and not accountable for what he did. Perhaps the reason the brother did not visit the sister is because he has been unable to take a vacation for the last ten years.

The more one travels about this planet and goes from home to home; from the palace of the rich to the hovel of the poor; from the sumptuous private office of the merchant prince to the counters of the small-salaried clerk, the more he ought to be impressed that this world, is not altogether a mean world, a selfish world, a heartless world; but it is a tired world, an overworked world, a sick world, a discouraged world, a misunderstood world. If every member of a family, who has bitter troubles and cares, could realize that his brothers and sisters

along the great highways of life are staggering under the same heavy burdens—although their burdens may be made up in different kinds of packs and have silken cords around them instead of hempen rope—he will be more patient in his criticism of others, as he may hope that others will judge him more charitably. Most of the seeming insults by relatives to relatives are entirely unintentioned. As there is a forgiveness for all penitents in the day of judgment, so there should be forgiveness for one who offends another through inadvertence and not through intention. The fancied injustices between relatives exist for the most part in the distorted imaginations of those who have no right to indulge in unchristian and merciless judgments of relatives who want to be friends.

It is easier for those who have been most sinned against to forgive than it is for the sinners to ask forgiveness. If it were harder for the creditor to forgive than for the debtor to be forgiven; for the man who has been slandered to forget than for the misrepresenter to ask to

be pardoned; for the Samaritan to plead for the thief who wounded him on the Jericho road than for the thief to plead for mercy from the Samaritan; for Joseph to weep over his traitorous brethren than for the sons of Jacob to trust Joseph, there might be great difficulty in effecting family reconciliations. But this supposition is not true. The man who has been struck on one cheek is more apt to turn his other cheek towards his brother's lips, awaiting the kiss of love, than the brother who has been untrue is ready to love and to be loved. The sister who has had her cloak taken away is more willing to lend her coat also, than the sister who did the wrong to make reparation for her sin. It was easier for the martyr Stephen, when he was being stoned to death, to kneel down and make the gentle prayer for the divine forgiveness of his assailants, "Lord, lay not their sin to their charge," than it was for the stony-hearted murderers to weep over the mangled corpse of the slain.

As most people feel that some relatives have done them a cruel and a bitter injus-

tice, the chief responsibility for family reconciliations rests with those who have been wronged; with those who are absolutely certain they have been most sinned against. If it be hard for the man who has been sinned against to forgive, how much harder would it be for the one who has sinned to ask to be forgiven? This statement puts an entirely new aspect upon the case. The more a man broods, the more that he feels that a family wrong has been done him, the more it becomes his duty to take the initiative and try to adjust the family difficulties. Because one brother does wrong, and is not willing to make reparation and ask forgiveness, the other brother's unwillingness to forgive is not justified or made right. Some thieves may steal more than other thieves. That does not make the crime of stealing ten dollars an honorable occupation, although, in the sight of the law, a ten-dollar crime ought not to be punished by as heavy a sentence as a million-dollar defalcation. Some members of a family may stab at other members with the stiletto of the tongue. That does not

make it Christian, in the sight of God, for the other relatives to strike back with the same murderous weapon. Because some brethren have committed awful injustices, and said what they ought not to say, and yet are unwilling to ask to be forgiven, that does not make it right for the man who has been sinned against to be unwilling to forgive, aye, and to forgive, even though others are not willing to be forgiven. If Jesus had waited in heaven until sinful man had asked to be forgiven, there would never have been sung a Christmas carol, the shepherds would never have heard the glad tidings; the Wise Men in the east would not have seen the strange star. Jesus, by the sweet story of the manger, taught that brother should not only love his loving brother, but that he should also love his erring sister. Did not the angelic song, "On earth peace, good will toward men," find its echo in the sermon upon the mount, "Love your friends"? No. "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and

persecute you. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? Do not even the publicans do the same?" Can any man, woman or child read those divine words on Christmas day and not feel that the chief responsibility of family reconciliations rests with them, no matter how heinous and heartless may have been the actions of their ungrateful brothers and sisters?

Future opportunities of family reconciliations may be few. Human life at the longest is short. When children have grown and scattered, how soon they die! A family may exist intact for ten, twenty, thirty years, but after the Death Angel calls one child, he is very apt to come back soon for another and another, until all are gone. When the family plot is once selected, and a couple of graves dug therein, the hearse gets into the habit of traveling in the same direction, and the black horses of stopping at the same gate. The sad truth is that when death does come, regrets may be piled in flowers mountain high upon the casket; brothers may weep over the dead brother; the

hands may be pressed and the lips kissed and the forehead stroked, but the dead will hear not one word. He will not lift one eyelid, or smile one look of forgiveness back to those who want to be forgiven.

If this warning comes with mighty force to the brothers and sisters, how much more should it come to the fathers and mothers who are indifferent to their children. Many people are apt to judge the children harshly when domestic troubles arise between parents and their offspring. But, as men and women grow older and have children of their own, and see the almost idolatrous worship which children give to parents, they are more willing to blame the parent for the estrangement which exists between the father or mother and the child than they are to blame the child. Have the parents ever tried to win back the affections of the children? Did they ever try to call back the cruel remarks which they once made—remarks which cut into the children's hearts, as they never were bled before and as they never will be lacerated again? Have the

parents regularly gone to visit their children, as they used to do in those days when they sent on the warm invitations and the railroad tickets for their children and grandchildren to come and visit them? Have the parents ever tried to instill into their children's minds the thought that the father and the mother are absolutely dependent for happiness upon their children's affections?

Supposing the children have done wrong, and in all probability they have, who ought to forgive first? Who ought to be continually forgiving, until the old sweet relationships are restored? Ought not the father and mother show to the child a forgiving nature, no matter what the child may have said or done? Cannot the parents who are estranged from their children realize that the years may be very few in which it is possible for them to undo the wrongs of the past, and that when a child despises a parent, living or dead, that child must suffer the most awful of all heart agonies that can ever come to a human being this side of the grave? Bear and forbear, forgive and

be forgiven, are the teachings of "on earth peace, good will toward men." Before the next Christmas comes around it will be impossible for some to forgive and be forgiven. The casket-maker is even now manufacturing a coffin; the grave-digger is even now sharpening his pick and spade; the quarryman is even now cutting a tombstone; the bell-ringer is even now ready to toll a knell. Brothers and sisters, fathers and mothers, kith and kin, better stop and attune your family reconciliations to the notes of the Christmas Song!

The site of the Jerusalem temple was supposed by a legend to have been selected in this way: Many years ago, two brothers had adjacent farms near Mount Moriah. Both were married, but one had a large family of children, while the other was childless. During harvest, it was the custom to pile the sheaves together in the different fields. When the sheaves were thus piled together, the brother who had no children said to his wife: "There is my brother, he has a large family of children and I have none. It must be a struggle

for him to get along. So I will take some of my sheaves, unknown to him, and place them upon his pile and they may make him happier." The other brother at the same time was saying to his wife: "There is my brother, he has no children. He does not know the joy and the love of a nursery as I do. His home must be a very lonely home. I think I will take some of my sheaves and carry them over to his pile. Perhaps the gift will bring to him some of the happiness my children have brought to me." At midnight the two brothers went out and gathered up their sheaves. As they were staggering along under the loads of affection, they met just half-way between the farms, and fell on each other's necks and wept, because both brothers had found a true fraternal love. There on the scene of that incident of brotherly affection, the temple of Jerusalem was built.

Would that the Christmas Angel could sing again the song of "on earth peace, good will to men," because all relatives at the manger have been reconciled.

III

Three Wise Men

The most impressive fact about the narrative which describes the Nativity is its simplicity. The account of Jesus' birth is almost as simply told as is the familiar record which many a fond mother writes in the family Bible, in reference to the advent of her first-born. A dozen verses in all more than contain the short story. The second chapter of Matthew begins with the date. As one would say: "My sister was born in the year 1839," Matthew writes, "Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, in the days of Herod the king." Then comes the description of how the news was first brought into the Jewish capital. It came simultaneously with the appearance of three strange men, dressed in oriental costumes. They spoke foreign tongues. That is about all one can glean. The two first verses of the second chapter of Matthew combine within themselves the gist of the revelation: "Now, when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the

king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews, for we have seen his star in the east and are come to worship him?" The Magi have been the theme for many an artist's brush, poet's song, musician's oratorio, as well as many a minister's sermon.

The oriental travelers were wise men. Their names, their positions, their influence over their countrymen, are all matters of conjecture. Professor Sandys, in his "Christmastide," gives a strange legend. He writes that the first of these Magi was a very old man with a long, white beard. His face was wrinkled with thought, and his limbs were tottering. His name was Melchior. The second was a very young man. His cheek was smooth and ruddy, his step firm and athletic, his arm strong and powerful. Yet his mind was clear as his searching eye. His name was Caspar. Truly he was a prince among men. The third sage was a middle-aged Moor, called Balthasar. In his hair and beard were the blackness of the midnight. The muscles stood out in

knots upon his swarthy neck. The legend declares that these three men followed the guidings of a huge bird, whose eyes glittered like a monster star. But whether the three sages were named Melchior, Caspar, and Balthasar, and whether the star in the east was the monster eye of a huge eagle or no—whether there is any truth among the many legends that are told about these noted travelers—this fact is certain, they were wise men. The Bible distinctly states that "there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews?"

The believer should feel very glad that the first men who started to find the manger were wise men. Infidels and agnostics are apt to sneer at the mentality of manger-worshipers. They state that before a man believes the story of Bethlehem he must first eschew all his common sense. They declare that the book of Matthew is only a foolish story, acceptable to effeminate men and weak-minded women. They assert that the birth of Jesus was just the same as the birth of

any other child. But these infidel statements are here and now thrown to the four winds. Jerusalem was the capital. Jerusalem was the center of all eastern intelligence. The appearance of these men was known everywhere. Matthew would not have dared, only a few years after Christ's death, to write in his gospel the words "wise men," unless they were wise, and unless their intelligence and erudition were beyond dispute.

But why place such emphasis upon the intellectual power of the three men who first came to the manger? The wise men of all time have been following the leadership of the first great pioneers. The brainiest men of every civilized nation have been seen to enter the caravansary and kneel by the sacred altar. About the manger, Saints Leo, Chrysostom, and Bernard; Bishops Andrews and Newman; John Wesley, Faber, Bourdaloue, Rowland Hill, Spurgeon, Joseph Parker, Dwight L. Moody have preached their mightiest sermons. The greatest hymnologists, Charles Wesley, Tate and Byrom, Bishops Heber and Keble have written

their poetic masterpieces. The greatest painters, Murillo, Raphael, Leonardo da Vinci, Guido, Fra Angiollotto, Giotto, Lippi, Lorenzo, Andrea Montegna, Perugino, Paul Veronese, Coreggio and a host of others have exhausted their genius to reproduce a stable not a palace, a stone crypt not a canopied crib. Among all the compositions of Gluck, Mendelssohn, Schubert, Chopin, Mozart, Haydn, Wagner and Beethoven there is not a greater than Handel's "Messiah." For once Handel out-Handeled Handel. Study the history of William E. Gladstone, Isaac Newton, Agassiz, Sir William Hamilton, Hugh Miller, Sir William Jones, Washington, the Adamses, Sir Walter Scott, John Calvin, Thomas Chalmers, William McKinley, and it will be seen that the wise men of all times have been willing to bow at the manger.

The wise men came from a long distance. The Bible asserts that they journeyed from the east. The word "east" is very indefinite. It might mean eastern Asia or China. It might and probably does mean Persia or India. At all

events, the east was far off. The wise men would have been unable to find Jerusalem had they not been led by that strange star. The Magi had many a weary day's march. Traveling in their time had to be done on foot, or on horse or camel back. They had to tramp through the parched deserts. They had to climb the loftiest of mountains and fathom many a deep valley. How tired they must have become. If Melchior was old, in all probability he would never have reached the manger but for the strong arms of his two friends. But whenever the three wise men halted that gleaming star would beckon them on and on and on.

The wise men coming from the east did not have to travel any further to the manger than some sinners will have to travel. When sinners wandered forth into wayward paths, like the younger son in the parable, they went into the "far country." They went so far away from Bethlehem of Judea that they were beyond the pleading voices of loved ones; beyond the sight of home, perhaps be-

yond the seas. But when Christmas rolls around, there is a longing to be back in the sacred family circle that will gather about the manger. They want to hear again their mother's prayers. They want to stand by the snow-covered graves. Some of them will have to travel far to do this. They will have to leave many old associates; leave their old habits behind; leave the "far country" of the east; leave the land of sin.

In imagination, the wise men can be seen working at their scientific tasks. One is studying in one part of the house, another in another, and the third in still another. Perhaps Melchior, the aged astrologer, with an astronomical glass, is silently and earnestly studying the heavens. Patiently the aged scientist is watching and waiting for the stars to change their relative positions. Suddenly a tremor of excitement shakes his frame. Silently, swiftly, awfully, divinely, there passes before the telescopic lens a strange light. It does not look so much like a star as a great orb of light. It is a diamond glittering upon the finger of

God, beckoning, always beckoning. In great excitement, the old man staggers to his feet and calls to his two comrades. Caspar, the smooth-faced, rises quickly and rushes into the room, being younger and more agile than the swarthy, middle-aged Moor. At first the three say nothing. They are too absorbed to speak. Then Balthasar opens a musty parchment, written hundreds of years before, and begins to read from the Hebrew Prophet Micah. "'But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall come forth unto me, that is to be ruler in Israel, whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.'" "Yes," responds the old man, Melchior, "that reminds me of another passage, from the Hebrew Prophet Isaiah." With trembling fingers he follows the words, while his quavering voice reads—"'He was oppressed and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth. He was brought like a lamb to the slaughter and as a sheep dumb before his shearers.'" "Yes," interposes the poetic young Caspar, "that

reminds me of what the Hebrew Psalmist wrote. 'Thou art my son, lo I come; in the volume it is written of me.'" "Come, comrades!" they shout to each other, "come; the star is beckoning us; come, come!" Would that before the dawn of next Christmas, many exiles from Christ might start and take this journey with the wise men and leave the far country of sin, leave behind their dead selves, and seek the manger which is afar off in the land of purity and love!

The wise men came to seek a king in a palace; they found Him in a barn. Among all the millions who had read the Scriptural prophecies in reference to the birth and the life of Jesus Christ, there was not one who expected the Messiah to come as He did. The Jews were looking for an earthly king, whose royal court would eclipse the splendors of a Solomon. They were looking for a warrior, who would free them from Roman tyranny. If the Jews were expecting such a Messiah, how much more were the Magi of the east seeking a temporal potentate? The most natural place for Melchior, Caspar and

Balthasar—if these were the sages' names—to seek was the royal palace of Jerusalem. A future king implies, as a rule, the son of a present king. When the star of the east led them on toward Bethlehem, it passed over the domes of the capital. These men naturally sought an interview with Herod, the Hebrew ruler. This is exactly the way the story goes. "When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him." Herod called together the great brained men of his province, and they told the Magi that this future king was to be born in a little village six miles beyond the capital. Thither they went and there they found Jesus, lying upon a bed of straw with Mary, His mother.

The possibility of finding Christ in a place where He is not expected is beautifully illustrated in the story of the Russian peasant who was on his way home one winter night. As he plodded through a blizzard he came to the outskirts of the Russian army and was halted by the sentinel on guard. After talking for a little while

with the sentinel, he saw that the soldier was benumbed with the cold. So the peasant took off his heavy woolen cloak and threw it about the shoulders of the soldier. A few nights later the peasant was dying from pneumonia, which he contracted during the blizzard from taking off his cloak. In his delirium, he saw a stranger enter the sick room. This stranger was arrayed in peasant garb. "Who are you?" asked the sick man. "I am Christ," said the stranger. "I have come to take you to your reward." "No," said the dying man, "you could not be Christ. You are dressed in a peasant garb. My Christ is always robed in spotless white." "Oh, yes, I am Christ," answered the Saviour. "Do you not recognize the cloak? Do you not remember the cloak thou did'st place about the shoulders of the freezing Russian soldier? I have come in that same cloak to guide thee to thy reward. I am thy Jesus. I was naked and ye clothed me." So, like the Russian peasant and the ancient Magi, every modern wise man is apt to find the Infant Christ in a place, and at a time,

and in a condition such as he never expected. He expects to be converted like Paul; he is brought to the Saviour like the gentle John. He expects to find Him at church; he sees Christ first when praying by his own mother's knee. He expects to be lifted off his feet with holy rapture when surrendering his heart to the Master; he finds that religion is a matter of belief, not a matter of feeling. He expects to see Jesus a man; he finds Him only a little child. He expects to seek Christ among the kings and queens, the learned and the famed, the rich and influential; in all probability, he will find Jesus among the poor and the outcast, the sick and the homeless, the unknown and the friendless, the hungry, the halt and the blind.

When the wise men found their King in a barn instead of in a palace they did not reject Him. No, they accepted Jesus just as they would have done had He been born a prince in Herod's household. They had traveled too far for them to turn back without kissing His hands and feet. They saw the star shining too

brightly above their heads no doubt, though the new-born King did not come in the way that He was expected. The proofs of Christ's divinity were so overwhelming that the Magi were ready to accept Him as the ruler of their spiritual as well as of their temporal lives.

The great trouble with sinners of the present time is they will not accept the Babe of Christmas Morn because He did not come in the way they wanted Him to come. They do not wish to accept the Saviour as the wise men of old did. They want to accept Him as did the multitudes who worshiped Him when He fed them upon the mountain side with the loaves and the fishes. They want to worship Him as some invalids of old worshiped Him, merely to have Him heal their physical and not their spiritual ailments. They want to worship Him as the inhabitants of Jerusalem did when they threw the palms under the feet of His beast of burden when He made a triumphal entry into the Davidic capital, because they thought that as a temporal conqueror He would place Himself at

the head of the Jewish armies and throw off the hated yoke of Rome. They do not want to worship Him as the Son of God, who could be brought in chains into the Judgment Hall of Pilate and scourged with whips and die upon a cross, so that He could liberate a human race burdened with sin. They do not want to worship Him as one who has been bruised and mangled and crucified in order that they might be glorified and saved from never ending pain. The proofs, the unrefuted proofs, that Jesus was born the Son of God are just as impregnable to-day as in the time of the ancient Magi. But the difference between the foolish men of the living generation and the wise men of nearly two thousand years ago is that the foolish live men do not accept Christ, while the wise men of old knelt and worshiped at the manger even though Jesus did come as a spiritual king instead of a temporal; even though He was born in such a place to fulfill a condition about which the Magi had never dreamed.

The wise men, because they were ready

to receive Christ when they found Him in a stable, gave unto the Saviour their presents of gold and frankincense and myrrh. Outside of this manifestation of the wise men's love for the Saviour, but few people have ever stopped to consider the significance of those valuable gifts. Joseph was nothing but a poor carpenter. He was so poor that when he took the famous journey to Bethlehem, he could not leave Mary behind in Nazareth, because there was no one to look after her. The old neighbors despised her, because they said she was not a good woman. The servants would not take care of her, because Joseph did his own work and had no servants to care for the helpless young bride. Joseph, therefore, took Mary along. When the awful night came and Jesus was about to be born, Joseph could not even find a home to shelter his wife. He took Mary to a common stable. It has been stated that the reason Mary was not taken to a house was because the village was full. 'Tis true, the homes at that time may have been full; but money will open almost

any door, if one has enough money to spend. Joseph would have spent every cent he possessed at such a crisis as that. Then came the vision, directing Joseph to flee into Egypt. How would the poor carpenter have been able to flee, and to support Mary and her child, unless he had money? Then it was that the presents of gold and frankincense and myrrh, which the wise men brought, helped the carpenter and saved the Divine Child from the wrath of the bloody Herod. Jesus was rescued and preserved for His divine mission. Would that the modern Christians with consecrated lives might do as much for the Master in bringing their gifts, as those men did many years ago.

"Three kings, the King of kings, three gifts did bring,
Myrrh, incense, gold, as to man, God a King;
Three holy gifts be likewise given by thee
To Christ, even such as acceptable be.
For myrrh, tears; for frankincense impart
Submissive prayers; for pure gold, a pure heart."

Henry Van Dyke, some years ago, wrote one of the most beautiful of all Christmas stories. It has a very appropriate title to be used as an illustration

for this chapter. It is called, "The Other Wise Man." Mr. Van Dyke wrote the story while in great pain. It was the year his father died, and a year of much physical suffering. One night, while lying awake and unable to sleep, he began to think of the legends clustering about the three wise men. Then there came to him a vision of a fourth wise man, who had the gentle name of Artaban. The abbreviation of the whole story is this: Instead of there being three wise men, there were four. When the star appeared in the east, the four Magi felt that they must put their household goods in order before they took their journey. They decided to meet in a certain place, at a certain time, upon the edge of the great desert. Artaban made ready for his journey by selling his house and worldly goods, and buying three beautiful gems which he could carry; namely, a sapphire, a ruby, and a pearl. On his way to meet his appointment, Artaban came across a poor beggar, dying—a beggar who had no friends, a beggar who was dying alone. After nursing the poor beggar until he

died, Artaban hurried on to meet his appointment. The three Magi had already gone. The other wise man had to retrace his steps, sell one of his gems, his sapphire, and buy a train of camels to make the journey alone.

The next beautiful picture in which the other wise man is found is in the city of Bethlehem. Jesus had been born and the three Magi had disappeared. As Artaban entered the village, he heard the tramp of bloody Herod's troops, who had come to massacre all the male children in Judea, with the hope of slaying the Infant Christ. A poor woman rushes out, pleading for the rescue of her child. The young mother's face grew white with terror at the cry, "The soldiers! the soldiers of Herod! They are killing our children!" When a captain of Herod's troops wanted to enter this woman's house to slay her child, Artaban stood in the doorway and offered to the murderous soldier his second gem, a beautiful ruby, if he would save the child. Two-thirds of the other wise man's fortune were gone, and still he had not found Christ.

Then Artaban started on a journey to Egypt to find Jesus. He hunted for Him everywhere, until he was a very old man. One day, in his wanderings to find the Saviour, he retraced his steps to the city of Jerusalem. The capital of David was in great excitement. There was to be a public crucifixion of three criminals, two of them thieves and one a political prisoner, Jesus by name. As Artaban entered the city, he saw a young girl in great distress. She was to be sold as a slave for debt. She broke loose from her captors, and, flinging herself at his feet, begged for deliverance. Artaban gave his last gem for her rescue, the beautiful pearl. And now all his money was gone, and he was an old man, and had not found Christ. Then the darkness of the crucifixion began to gather around the cross and hung over the temple. When the awful earthquake came, a heavy tile slipped from the roof of one of the houses and fell upon the old man's head. But, as he lay dying, a spirit appeared before Artaban, and addressed him: "Thou, O noble man, thou hast seen me all these

years. Verily I say unto thee, inasmuch as thou hast done it unto one of the least of these, my brethren, thou hast done it unto me." Then Artaban knew, in his last moments on earth, that he had seen the Christ face to face.

If the Christian living to-day cannot belong to the first group that started for the manger; if he cannot be Melchior, Caspar or Balthasar, perhaps he may belong to the second caravan. He may be Artaban. He may be the other wise man.

IV

Christmas Joseph

Many books, newspaper articles and sermons have been written about the different characters who were gathered within the four walls of the Bethlehem khan, on the memorable night when Jesus was born. There have been dissertations upon the wise men, the shepherds, the gentle-faced Mary, the Divine Child, and even upon the horses, sheep and cattle which were huddled together in that famous stable; also upon the star which gleamed above, and upon the presents of gold and frankincense and myrrh that were piled upon the stone floor. Few people have ever read a chapter descriptive of the life of Joseph the carpenter. Joseph, who was "the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ."

It was not a mere haphazard chance that this big-hearted Hebrew surrounded the life of the beautiful young girl with his almost unparalleled wealth of deep, noble, unselfish, protecting affection. His

presence at the manger was not that of an interloper, nor of an undesired or obnoxious personality. Christmas Joseph was called to the Bethlehem khan by the voice of God, as surely as the Magi were guided there by the stellar light, or as the shepherds were summoned thither by the angelic songs. In all sacred and profane history, there is no character more rich in suggestive teachings; more inspiring for those who are facing the every-day struggles of human existence, than is the prosaic career of the humble carpenter.

The fulfilment of prophecy was accomplished by Joseph's journey to the Judean hills. All governments, both ancient and modern, have been made possible by the levying of a public tax. A government, whether it be a monarchy, an oligarchy or a republic, has its financial obligations to satisfy, as well as the individual. But in olden times, the Roman government not only taxed the provinces to meet its legitimate expenses, but also to squeeze as much money as possible out of its conquered people. As the result of this extortionate intention, about the time of

Jesus' birth, a general order was sent from the palace of Augustus Caesar to Herod, the Governor of Judea, that a new census should be taken, and all taxable properties should be registered before proper public officials. The Roman law was very explicit upon the necessity of every man appearing at the place of registering. Women who possessed taxable property did not necessarily have to personally appear. A written schedule of female properties, if presented in time, and properly sworn to, was sufficient; but the men had to appear in person at the place specified for the registering. Thus it is easily seen why Joseph, who was the descendant of King David, had to take that long journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem in order to obey the Roman law when all the male descendants of King David assembled at the proper time in the place where their great ancestor once lived.

That Joseph was the descendant of the shepherd boy who slew the famous Goliath, there is no doubt. In the first chapter of Matthew there is given a genealogical

table which traces Joseph's family history from Abraham down to the manger, in which is found the record that David, who was the father of Solomon, was also the ancestor of Jacob, who begot Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ. And in the third chapter of Luke, there is the same genealogical table of Joseph's family which starts from the manger and goes back through the different progenitors to the same great ancestor Abraham, who was the descendant of Adam, who was created by God in the Garden of Eden. In this second genealogical table of Joseph's family the record runs like this: "And Jesus himself began to be about thirty years of age: being, as was supposed" (not in fact, but only in the sight of the law) "the son of Joseph which was the son of Heli . . . which was the son of David which was the son of Jesse." So it was because Joseph the carpenter was the descendant of King David, as Mary the Virgin was also the descendant of the same great ancestor, that he was compelled in obedience to the

Roman law to take that long journey to the Judean hills. And because Joseph took that journey Jesus was born in the place where, ages before, the prophets had foretold that Christ should be born. Mary, in the delicate condition of her health, of her own accord would never have taken that dangerous journey. She would have sent her sworn statement as every Israelitish woman could do. But because Joseph had to go, she, for reasons already explained, accompanied him.

A man who leaves the work undone which has been given him by God to do, leaves it undone forever. A sinner may repent of his sins at fifty or sixty years of age; but he can never grasp again the lost opportunities of an evil past. He may improve the future, and live the last ten years of life as he ought to live; but the twilight of life can never change the records of the morning and the noontide of his earthly existence. Other workers may seem to fill up the gap of an unfulfilled mission; but every worker has his full individual work to do. A divine commission once neglected is neglected for-

ever. Had John the Baptist not done his duty, the prophesied forerunner would not have appeared. Had Joseph the carpenter not done his duty, there would have been no divine birth in Bethlehem of Judea, and the Scriptures would not have been fulfilled. If any man of all the millions of the human race who have ever lived had a right and a mission to stand by the manger, that man was Christmas Joseph. He was almost as essential there as was the mother of the Divine Child.

The protection and the development of Christ during the days of His helpless infancy were provided for by Joseph's journey to the Judean hills. Christ's childhood days were passed in much the same way that other children live out their earlier years. The baby Jesus had to be watched, and washed, and dressed, and fed. He had to be taught to creep and walk, and run and play. He had to be developed physically and mentally, the same as every baby boy grows. Many miracle-working legends cluster about the babyhood and boyhood of Christ, but there is not one sentence in all the Bible

to prove that they have in them a scintilla of truth. Of course, Jesus was a precocious lad, and at times His parents could not understand Him. This was instanced by the first scene in the temple when, as a boy of twelve years of age, Christ talked with the learned Rabbis and confounded them with His answers and His searching questions. But that the Saviour was raised just as every other boy is raised, there is no doubt. He followed His mother, as other children did their mothers when, at eventide, she went down to the Nazareth well to draw water. He went to sleep in her lap, when Mary sang to Him a lullaby, just as other children are wooed into the land of sweet dreams by the maternal songs. He cried when He was hungry, as other babies are accustomed to cry. When the mother of the Divine Child was looking after the home wants of her boy, Joseph the carpenter went forth into the world, to earn bread and clothes, and shelter and educational advantages, by means of his mechanical tools. There is no more beautiful picture than that painted by the

great master, who opens the door of the carpenter shop of Nazareth for all the world to look in. On one side of the room sits a woman sewing. Her eyes are downcast. Her fingers are busy. "She layeth her hands to the spindle, and her hands hold the distaff." She is Mary the mother. At her feet is a little, flaxen-haired child who is called Jesus. The floor is covered with shavings. The carpenter's implements are scattered everywhere. A strong-limbed Hebrew is bending over a table, joining together two pieces of wood. He is the Christmas Joseph; Joseph, who is earning bread for the Infant Christ.

Sometimes, God gives His greatest opportunities of usefulness to His most humble and inconspicuous disciples. He may inspire a great-brained Moses to lead forth the Israelitish slaves from Egyptian servitude, and to make of them a conquering nation. He may command the wisdom of Solomon to restore the temple's grandeur. He may detail the brilliant Paul to humble the vaunted intellectualities of Athens, and to carry the

Gospel into a Caesar's palace. God also selected Christmas Joseph, the poor carpenter, to do as great, if not a greater, work than all, namely, to protect and care for and develop Christ during the years of His helpless infancy. Joseph did not know the far-reaching influence of his own life, any more than the little band of Pilgrims, who were starving among the New England hills, knew that their lives would mold and develop the vitalities of a mighty nation which should stretch from the Atlantic to the Pacific, from the great lakes to the Gulf Stream. Indeed, the more one studies the early life of Jesus Christ, the more is he impressed with the fact that the Saviour did not Himself fully know His own divine mission, until He had been baptized by Saint John in the Jordan, and had spent forty days in the Wilderness. It behooves every one to do his best in life, no matter how humble his sphere may be, because Joseph, the poor carpenter, had a right to stand, on Christmas morn, by the side of Mary at the manger.

The molding, moral example for the

Infant Christ, of a pure marital love, was provided for by Joseph's journey to the Judean hills. Nothing manlier in all history is recorded than Joseph's actions toward his espoused wife. That he loved Mary there was no doubt. He loved her with that deep, tender, holy affection which only a truly strong, good man can give to a truly good, noble and beautiful woman. He loved her with such a love that he would have willingly laid down his own life, if thereby he could have made his loved one the happier for the sacrifice. He loved her so much that her companionship became the hope and the inspiration of his very existence.

Yet strange is the law that great love can give birth to great hate! When an idol is found to be false, the devotee who once knelt at the shrine to worship is the first one who is willing to be the iconoclast to shatter the adored image. The tenderest love which the heart bears for another heart is often changed into the desire for bitterest revenge, if the loved one is untrue to her plighted troth. When Mary the Virgin told Joseph that she was

about to become the mother of the Infant Christ, he became greatly troubled. The Bible declares that he was about to break the bonds of the marital engagement, and "put her away privily." But an angel of the Lord appeared unto him and said that Joseph should take unto him Mary as his wife, "for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost," and that Joseph should call the child's name Jesus. Joseph married her even when he knew that the neighbors would despise her. He married Mary and became as true to her and her child as though Jesus had been his own son.

If this big-hearted Hebrew was ready to put his strong arm around the young girl, and draw her to his side and then turn and, with flashing eye, face the slanderers as he cried, "He who strikes at her strikes me! She is my wife, and I am Joseph her husband," is it too much to suppose that such a husband could not be anything but gentle, and kind and loving and thoughtful to Mary, during their whole marriage career? And if it was important for Jesus the Saviour to grow up

nurtured by the example of a true husband loving a true wife—for God would not have allowed the Christmas Joseph to live with Mary thus, had it not been important—how much more important is it that parents of the present day should show to their children the right examples of marital affections. The divine love is first revealed to God's earthly children by the love which one Christian bears toward another human being. This divine love is most easily taught when a little child sees a Christian father and Christian mother walking side by side before God, bound to each other by Christian trust. The child never ceases to love and revere and almost worship the parent, until the father or mother does something sinful or selfish or merciless or untrue, to shatter the love of the child. Never, never! May all parents tenderly develop their own children's lives by the influence of the Christian husband's treatment of the Christian wife, and the Christian wife's treatment of the Christian husband, even as the divine life of the Boy Christ was developed by the

influence and example of the Christmas Joseph's love and honor and protection of the gentle Mary.

The Saviour's struggle for daily bread, when He became a young man, was also planned by Joseph's journey to the Judean hills. Every profane writer who has penned a description of the Christmas Joseph makes him out to be a middle-aged or an old man at the time of his marriage to Mary. Some declare that he was a widower, and had had children by a former wife; others that he never was married but once, and had children by Mary after Jesus was born. Still others held that he was compelled to marry his brother's widow by the Jewish law, and that among the sons of Cleophas was James, who became first Bishop of Jerusalem. Joseph was in all probability a middle-aged or an elderly man when he married Mary. This statement is not absurd, because the Scriptures never mention Joseph the carpenter's presence after the Boy Jesus appeared in the temple, at twelve years of age, to talk with the doctors. Joseph was not with Mary

at the wedding in Cana of Galilee. He was not with Jesus during any of His tours. He was not with Christ at the time of the Crucifixion. The reader has a right to suppose that, a short time after Christ came to young manhood, Joseph the carpenter died, and Christ had to take upon His own young shoulders the support of His mother's family. The sweetest supposition is not to think of Joseph as a widower, who married Mary as his second love, but rather to think of him marrying first as a middle-aged bridegroom, and one who had children by Mary after Jesus was born, and who passed away when he was about sixty years of age. This last supposition would harmonize with the verses in Matthew, when a messenger came and announced to Jesus that His mother and brethren had come, and were waiting without and desired to speak to Him. Thus the young man Jesus not only had to support Himself but also His mother and His younger brothers and sisters, if He had any sisters.

There must have been many weary hours of toil, when the young man Christ

fought on with hammer and saw to keep the bloodhounds of cold and hunger from the door. There must have been times when Jesus' back ached, and when His fingers bled and His hands were cut. It is easy to strike the thumb, when the tired workman has hardly enough strength to direct another blow with the hammer. Christ the Man sympathized with hunger, because Christ the Boy perhaps had sometimes gone faint to bed, that His younger brothers and sisters might have enough to eat. The ties which bound Jesus to Mary, and the mother to her Divine Son, were very tender and sacred. Side by side, they must have struggled to rear those children. Jesus was ready to say that He had come to seek and to save that which was lost, because Christ Himself, as a boy, had learned the first lesson of His mission as a Saviour by the tears and the heartaches and the disappointments which He had to bear and suffer in the carpenter shop of the deceased Christmas Joseph.

By studying the history of Joseph the carpenter, it is seen how his life was de-

signed to be fitted into Christ's life, and Jesus's life into that of Joseph. Furthermore, it is interesting to note how Joseph's death was a means to develop the boy Christ, just as Joseph's life had been a means to develop the Infant Christ. Sometimes a man can accomplish more by dying than by living; by being sick than by being well; by suffering a seeming defeat, than by winning a glorious victory; by being very poor, than very rich.

Sir Walter Scott went in and out of the Scottish glens, gathering up the tales which used to be told by the campfires of the followers of Wallace and Bruce. A modern writer has published an old legend, which used to be believed by the Swiss, living upon the sides of the mighty Alps. There was once a rock capping the summit of a lofty mountain. The rock covered a deep cavern, filled with gold and precious stones. Every Christmas eve, when the village clock began to strike the hour of twelve, this rock would open and stay open as long as the clock was striking the midnight hour. But as

soon as the clock finished the last stroke of twelve, the stony jaws of the rock would snap shut and keep shut for another whole year. One Christmas eve, a young bride and groom decided that they would scale that lofty mountain, and as soon as the clock would begin to strike the midnight hour, the young man would leap into the cavern and gather some of the treasures for his bride as a Christmas gift. Hand in hand they went up the Alpine sides. Hand in hand they crossed the slippery glaciers and stepped upon the edges of the awful crevices. When the clock began to strike, the rock did open. The young man leaped into the cavern, to throw out the golden treasures. But his cupidity lasted too long. He stayed one second beyond the stroke of twelve. The rocky jaws snapped shut, and he was entombed forever!

This old legend is a warning against selfishness and greed. But if there ever was a life which was swallowed up in the existence of another life, that life was the life of Christmas Joseph, who gave his life for Christ. He was part of Christ's exist-

ence at the manger. He was part of Christ's existence in Egypt. He was part of Christ's existence in Nazareth. And Christ's life was developed as much by the death as by the life of Christmas Joseph. Joseph the carpenter made no mistake. By losing his life he found it. By welcoming Death, he won a righteous crown.

V

Noble Requests

Many years ago, the custom was started of giving Christmas presents. The custom dates as far back as the year when the three wise men journeying from the east brought their presents of gold and frankincense and myrrh, and laid them at the Saviour's feet. In rich homes, elaborate preparations for Christmas may be made; but, though more costly, they are not so elaborate as those that are often made in the humble homes, where most people are born. The poor man's nursery often shelters large numbers of children. The father's income is small, and the demands made upon that income are very large. So, weeks ahead, the mother comes to the children and gives them each a pencil and paper, and says: "Daughter or son, you write upon that paper a list of all the things you want for Christmas. If we can afford some of them, we will give you what you want." Then the mother takes the lists and goes shopping, week in and week out. The

strange bundles come to the house and are secretly piled away in a mysterious closet, which is always locked.

On Christmas morning, the eager children rush into a specified room. There are the different chairs and tables, covered with the different bundles. Upon each one of these bundles is the name of a certain member of the family, and also that of the giver. And when the packages are opened, each one invariably finds some of the gifts which were written upon the lists many weeks before. From every part of the room can be heard almost the same gleeful remark: "Why, that is just what I wanted." So important is Christmas in the homes of the ordinary people, that for months ahead but few luxuries are bought, and the words which greet every desire are "Wait until Christmas. See what Santa Claus will bring."

God wants His children to make Him out a list of their desires. They can ask from God anything they wish for next Christmas, if they only ask in Christ's name. This essential is a very appropriate one. Jesus was born on Christmas

day. The name "Christmas" is merely a combination of two words—"Christ" and "Mass" — which mean the "festival of Christ." Of course, Christians should not ask in Christ's name anything which would be displeasing to the Saviour. As men and women are no longer children, and have no desire for a lot of silly toys, or baby dolls or whistles and drums, they should write out for their Christmas presents from God a list of their desires which will influence their whole future lives. The words "Whatsover ye shall ask in my name, that will I do" teach that God is just as ready to grant a big Christmas gift as a small one.

Among the noblest of requests would be that for a position of earthly influence. It is right and proper for everyone to have a healthy ambition. Each man, woman and child, no matter how humble their sphere in the social world, should strive to make the most out of their lives. Positions of earthly influence confer upon the occupant of such a position the opportunity to market all of his mental and spiritual gifts. If a father gives his son a

check for a thousand dollars, that son ought to be very grateful. How much more grateful should the son be, if that parent offers him a position in the business firm where he can annually make many times the value of the original check. The subject should feel grateful to the king who honors him with words of commendation. But the subject should feel more grateful still to that king who offers him a commission in the army, or in the civil service, or in the cabinet, where he shall have future opportunities to win greater praise from the royal lips than he has ever received in the past. The believer should want his Lord and Master to give to him a Christmas gift. But he should also want and ask from his Saviour a position of earthly influence, so that he may do something for Christ, as well as have Jesus do something for him.

Many men never seem to have any opportunity in life. They work hard. They seem to have all the mental, physical and spiritual equipment for positions of great influence; but they never seem

able to reach their right spheres. They started wrong, and they have never been able to retrace their steps and get started right. To use an old, worn-out figure, they seem to be round pegs trying to fit square holes, or else square pegs trying to fit round holes. Like the life of Samuel Johnson, their whole career is a struggle against misfortune. Like the life of Thomas Carlyle, they may have such a long bitter fight for a position of influence, that when the position does come, they are old, worn-out men or women, with dispositions soured and natures made cynical by adversity. Ulysses S. Grant would have accomplished but little in this world, had it not been for the Civil War. Up to forty years of age, he had made a failure of everything he tried. He made a failure as a farmer, as a tanner, as a merchant. Within four years of the time when he was to take the oath of office as President of the United States, this man, who affected the destines of the nation as no other man did during the era of civil strife, with the exception of Abraham Lincoln, was a poor clerk in his

father's country store in a little Illinois village. When the Civil War broke out, he could not at first find even a commission in the northern armies. When he was beginning his wonderful career in the west, his future fame was very nearly obliterated by the higher authorities relieving him of his command, and claiming that he was an incompetent.

There are thousands and tens of thousands of living men and women, who might make a success, if they could only have a position of influence as a vantage ground. There are multitudes who could easily support their aged parents and send their children to school, if they could only find the right positions in the businesses for which their peculiar gifts are adapted. The best pulpits are not always filled by the best ministers. The ablest doctors and surgeons do not always have the largest practice. The keenest lawyers do not always receive the biggest fees. King Solomon recognized this principle thousands of years ago when he wrote in Ecclesiastes, "The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong; neither yet

bread to the wise nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favors to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all."

The believer should not go to God, as a mere beggar goes from house to house, asking for alms that he may not have to work. He should rather ask from God a Christmas gift of a place of earthly influence, where he can work and work hard —where he can work so hard that he shall develop all his latent powers. He should ask of God a position of influence so that in one year he shall be able to give back to God something as noble as God is now ready to give him.

A position of earthly influence should not be asked from God as a Christmas gift above that in which the mental and physical abilities of the recipient qualify him to serve. A big man in a small position is to be pitied. The noted musician who has to sit hour after hour teaching a little school-girl the rudiments of music and how to drum the scales, must fret and groan. The greatest of English orators, like Edmund Burke, or the noblest of

English writers, like John Milton, must have had many a scornful hour when they saw men of inferior talents winning the popular applause and occupying the highest governmental positions. But the big man in the small place is not to be pitied nearly as much as the small man in the big place. The great orator who can charm a small audience should be far happier than the poor speaker who disappoints a large throng. The inspired writer, sitting in a small study, has a thousand fold more reason to be more grateful to God than the incompetent statesman whose official pen is plunging a nation into international strife and whose blunders are bringing misery and woe and poverty and disease and death to hundreds and thousands of innocent homes. When the believer asks of God as a Christmas gift a position of earthly influence, he must not ask of Him too small a place, neither should he ask of God too big a place; in either of which by brain and body he would be unable to rightly serve. Then would he not only dishonor his Saviour but also disappoint

all the earthly friends who love him and who would be proud of his success, as he ought to love those friends and be proud of their successes.

Jesus taught this lesson when he spake the parable of the feast. Lines of prestige or social demarkation are very sharply drawn in the east. In no place is the law of official position more rigidly observed than at a feast. The king always sits at the head of the table, his chief official or guest at his right, the man of next importance to his left, and so on down the line. All England was disturbed by the quarrel which once existed in the royal family as to whether the Princess of Wales had a right to precede the daughters of Queen Victoria at a social function. Christ says, "When thou art bidden of any man to a wedding, sit not down in the highest room, lest a more honorable man than thou be bidden of him, and he that bade thee and him come and say unto thee, give this man place, and thou begin with shame to take the lowest room." A servant girl, born to the kitchen, and one who has no transcend-

ant abilities, should not wish to be a queen and hold a scepter. The raw recruit must not ask God to let him command an army. The mother of a large family of little ones should not wish to leave home and become a political agitator. The successful merchant should not seek to be a musician. Neither should a minister expect to use his pulpit as a place of financial barter and gain. The turtle can never grow the feathers and wings of a dove. The ground mole cannot have the flashing eyes of a hawk. In other words, when the believer asks of God as a Christmas present a position of earthly influence, he must not ask for a place too big nor for a place too small for his mental and physical abilities.

Among the noblest of requests is the desire to have the position of earthly influence which God gives to His believers as a Christmas present, taken away when the evil temptations of that successful position become too great for him to bear. Youth is usually considered the time for the sowing of "wild oats," when the human heart presents the least resist-

ance to sinful allurements. But one of the ablest writers of this country lately penned an article to prove that a man never outgrows his weakness toward sin. He went on to show that a successful man was more apt to sin at fifty than he was when a youth of twenty. The young man has many restraints surrounding him. His finances are generally low. To go to destruction stylishly takes money, and lots of money. The young man is living in his father's home, and he is carefully watched by parents and by elder sisters. He is looked down upon by the world at large because he is an inexperienced young man. But when a young man becomes a successful minister or lawyer or merchant, when he is an employer instead of an employé, when there is a large amount to his credit in the bank, then temptations come with all their most subtle force. No one but a successful minister knows how many temptations are ready to beckon him from the right path. No one but a physician knows how often his office has been the retreat of a Circe's retinue. No one but a lawyer knows the

struggle he has had to do what he ought to do, and to leave undone those things which he ought not to do. No one but a merchant knows how easy it would be for him to misuse his power. Solomon, as a young man, was true. When Solomon was old his wives led him astray.

Every minister of the Gospel should make this daily earnest prayer: "May God give me a work to do. May I do that work earnestly, truthfully, conscientiously, faithfully. When my powers begin to fail and I am unwilling to recognize that they are failing; when the praises of my people have made me so egotistic that I cease to depend upon God and only think of myself; when I believe that I am so strong that I cannot sin; in other words, when I begin to undermine the little good in life which, through the power of the Holy Spirit, I have been enabled to do, then may God take me, or take away my position so that I can and shall look only to him." Every Christian merchant should long for the time when God would destroy his business and sell the store under the sheriff's hammer if

that merchant has lived long enough to cease to be able to solve the great Gospel problem of "What shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose his soul." He should long for the time when God shall take away his position of influence if he is thereby led to set a wrong example before his clerks and to inculcating principles of dishonesty in their young lives. Every mother should wish to die before her sins could crush the pure affections or morally destroy the lives of her children. Almost every block of every street of every city has upon it, somewhere, the sad spectacle of a sinful old age. Many of these sinful, senile object-lessons have become drunkards and libertines. Some may have turned their backs upon their children. Some may squander their money as recklessly as the younger son did in the far country. Some may be perpetual disgraces to the lives of their children, and their children's children. Alas, alas! how many men and women might be mentioned who, if their lives had been shortened, ten or fifteen years would have left to posterity a much better record!

Some men may say: "With the exception of the last request, there has not been expressed one desire for the fulfilment of which I could ask as a divine Christmas present. I do not want another position of earthly influence, because I already feel that I have one. Perhaps it is not quite as large a position as someone else might wish, but I am entirely satisfied. I have a good business, and am able to make enough money to supply all my essential needs. I have a happy home. I would not, as a father, exchange my children for any other set of children in the world. My wife is devoted to her husband, and as a husband I am devoted to my wife. I have kind friends and neighbors. Good health and bright prospects. Next Christmas I will have a tree for the babies and presents for everyone, from the cook up to the old grandfather. Besides that, I have brains and health, and my work is not a burden but a joy." A man may have a position of earthly influence; he may have health and physical strength; he may have a happy home; and yet there is the noblest of all

requests he can ask from God as a Christmas present. He can ask for a purer, more unselfish, fuller, deeper, holier spiritual consecration to do the work which he has already been given to do. Next Christmas day, when he begins to estimate all the temporal and spiritual blessings with which God has surrounded him; when he begins to estimate all the opportunities for doing good which he might have grasped; furthermore when he begins to study the divine sacrifice and the sufferings which Jesus went through, of which the first Christmas was merely the beginning, will he not think that most people ought to feel ashamed, awfully ashamed, of their past lives? Will he not feel that most people should try to live in the future for others more in the spirit in which Christ lived for them? Christmas Evans received his name because he was left as a foundling one Christmas night upon a neighbor's doorstep. Perhaps every believer may be baptized thus by the Holy Spirit, because, before this coming Christmas, he shall be born anew.

Charles Dickens' beautiful "Christmas

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Carol" is the most famous of all Christmas stories. Never was a sermon more powerfully written than that penned by this great novelist. With the masterstroke of a word painter, he first shows us an old miserable, grinding miser in his counting-room, an enemy to every good impulse, a hater of all mankind. Then comes the wonderful transformation, when the old merchant is addressed by the ghost of his partner, over seven years dead. Then the three spirits, the Spirit of the Christmases Gone, the Spirit of the Christmas Present, the Spirit of the Christmases to Come take him upon his three famous journeys. The old miser lives over again the scenes of his boyhod. He is introduced into the homes, the happy though humble homes of those who are trying to make the world better. In awful fear, he sees what is to become of him if he does not repent and try to live as God wants him to live. The loving nephew's kindness pleads with him. The poverty of his poor underpaid clerk pleads with him. The little cripple, Tiny Tim, as sweet a character as was ever

drawn, lifts his pinched face and his crooked limbs, as he whispers "God bless us every one!" Then the old miser, the chief of Satan's disciples, becomes the big-hearted, loving Christian follower of Him who has made Christmas possible. From the chief of sinners man can not only become the least of all the saints, but he can gather with others around the sacred manger in which Mary the Virgin was once laid.

As the believer repeats the words Christ bade him speak: "Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name that will I do," may he change the prayer of Tiny Tim just a little. May he not only pray "God bless us every one," but may he also pray "May God make it possible for me this Christmas to bless every one with whom I may come in contact. Yes, every one! Every one!"